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THE WELLSBOROUGH AND TIOGA PLANK ROAD

By MISS MARY B. ROBINSON, Wellsboro, Pa.

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THE WELLSBOROUGH AND TIOGA PLANK ROAD

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"Shall we drive down the plank or out the Covington road?" was once a familiar question in our village. These two were the most comfortable of our thoroughfares, and lead the way out into the world. The older route was a part of the East and West Pike or State Road, which eventually stretched from the Delaware to Lake Erie, and linked together the county-seats of the Northern Tier. The fact that not far east from Wellsborough it crossed the Williamson road greatly enhanced its local importance. North, east, south and west thus met at Covington Four Corners, whose prosperity as a landing stage and distributing point was continued for some years after the coming of the Blossburg railroad in 1840. It remained for the improvement which is the subject of this paper to divert trade and travel to another channel.

For nearly a half-century the twelve hilly miles of the Covington road were the main avenue between Wellsborough and civilization. Along this course flowed the stir and movement of the time, fed by tributaries which extended far out into the surrounding wilds. In a letter written Sept. 14, 1839, from Pike Mills, near the site of Galeton, to a correspondent in Columbia, Pa., the writer says: "Fix on a day when you will be at Covington, and let me know in time that I may meet you there. The stage comes up from Williamsport on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays."

What a pity that the street by which the old highway left our borders could not have as "Covington Road" permanently preserved a name so historic and distinctive. Even "State Street," which at least had a flavor of the past, must need be supplanted by the present wholly colorless and commonplace title of "East Avenue."

Distance and the Laurel Hill spur of the Alleghenies were always obstructive to free intercourse with our original and southern frontier, and as early as 1815 the "Honorable Court" was petitioned for a road to connect Wellsborough and Newtown—as Elmira was then called. The prime movers in the project, however, were residents of Tioga township, who set forth that they had no convenient way of getting to Wellsborough, their county-seat, nor of carrying away their produce to market—Newtown being their nearest and best market.

It is curious to observe that this road made no attempt to thread the morasses of Crooked Creek valley ,but chose the Hill Difficulty, rather than the Slough of Despond. For three or four miles out from "Wellsborough Court House"—then an edifice of logs—it followed the previous Dartt Settlement road; then, turning north of east, crossed the river, and finally at the county line, near one Reuben Daggett's, met a Bradford county highway leading to the desired terminus.

I mention this pioneer road so particularly because, though differing in route, in respect to purpose it was the prototype of what the Tioga Plank Road first sought to be—a connecting link between

Wellsborough and Elmira. In the latter case, however, the original plan was never fully carried out.

In 1821, before the era of plank roads, the state gave us in its general course our present Tioga road. On its way from Wellsborough to Athens, in Bradford county, this thoroughfare followed down the valley of Crooked Creek, and crossed the Williamson road "at or near the Widow Rachel Berry's"—a wayside inn at the south end of what is now Tioga.

The plank road did not, therefore, begin ab ovo, but was constructed as an improvement upon the western portion of this old state highway.

In 1836 Canada, that land of dense and heavy timber, was the first to experiment with laying a plank track. That pine was employed for this purpose now seems a desecration, like the use of mahogany for railroad ties in the West Indies. Gratifying results led New York state to follow suit, with the substitution of hemlock for the original material. The idea "took," and spread rapidly, until over 2,000 miles of such road had been constructed, at an average cost of $1,833 per mile. Promoters set this sum against that of $3,500, the first cost of the macadam of the time and region, and held rose-colored views as to the durability of the wooden pavement.

When the contagion reached Tioga county, Pa., the story of the inception and execution of our home project may be read in the local newspapers. In particular, The Tioga Eagle, published at Wellsborough, furnishes many items in point.

In the issue of Feb .23, 1848, appears an editorial entitled, "The Tioga Plank Road." "We are gratified," says the knight of the quill, "to see that our citizens have taken up the subject in earnest. A petition is now circulating which asks the Legislature to incorporate a company to build a Plank Road from Wellsboro to Tioga village, and if necessary to extend the same to Elmira via Spencerville."

The rest of the article is a general dissertation obtained from a practical engineer who had built such a road in New York state. We catch the thrill of enthusiasm and the note of personal triumph when he says:

"As to the value of plank roads to the public, and to the owners, I can best answer you by saying that I saw a macadam road taken up 8 ft. in width for a plank track; and also by informing you that persons who have travelled over the best constructed roads in England say they much prefer the Salina plank road." (His own of course.)

The tenth of the following month, (April, 1848), an act was approved by which the new company was incorporated under the name, style and title of "The Tioga and Elmira Plank Road Company." This was no slight to Wellsborough, as the term "Tioga," pure and simple, meant at that time usually the county. The charter was full of powers, provisos and penalties, and seemed to cover every known contingency that might arise save that of lack of funds. Neverthcless, The Eagle proclaimed that in this lengthy and detailed document there were defects which handicappd the promoters of the scheme. In January, 1849, the editor explains:

"Our citizens, without an exception, appear to feel a lively interest in the completion of the contemplated plank road from this borough to Tioga village. The delay in opening the books for subscription is, we learn, in consequence of some inaccuracies in the act of assembly, which will be remedied during the present session

of the Legislature. There is not the least doubt but that the stock will all be taken instanter, and the road put under contract forthwith."

It looks as if the gentleman of the press were whistling to keep his courage up, for the forthcoming act corrected no "inaccuracy" save that of too short an allowance of time for the work. An ample extension was made, and the list of commissioners strengthened by the addition of new names.

With such encouragement the struggle began again. In August of the same year the opening of the books was finally advertised. The shares were offered at $50 each, but only the modest sum of $2 "cash down" was required.

The paper maintained a suspicious silence as to the result, and we know the project still hung fire. An attempt was being made to handle too great a distance, too many interests, too heavy expenses. At last a differentiation occurred, and on March 4, 1850, was incorporated "The Wellsborough and Tioga Plank Road Company."

Meanwhile the existing road through the valley must have been appalling—or certain outside influences very powerful—for it appears that there was some talk of choosing the hill route in preference.

In July of the same year a disappointed and disgusted editor relieves his feelings in the following paragraphs:

"We have heard nothing of late in relation to the road from Wellsboro to Tioga village or Mansfield. We had hoped that some one of these routes would be adopted and the work commenced this season.

"The present troubled road between Wellsboro and Tioga is the merest excuse for a road that can well be imagined. There is not even a passable bridge on the route, while the road is in the most shocking condition—some of the mud-holes are from one to three feet deep. The road laws are in effect a mere nullity."

The truth of this picture is attested by some of our older residents, who remember when it was no uncommon thing for the yeomen service of oxen to be sought for the rescue of stalled teams. Occasionally, as on a stretch below Potter's, the traveler was spared a horrible pit and the miry clay through the austere benevolence of a corduroy bridge. The resultant mode of progress, though somewhat startling, must have been an excellent digester for the favorite pork, mince pie and doughnuts of the period.

But "the world do move," and such conditions could not continue. Out of warring interests and opinions, and in spite of narrow means and the power of inertia, local energy and perseverance eventually succeeded in obtaining an effective working force. In April, 1851, The Eagle, with recovered spirits, is able to announce that:

"The stockholders of the Wellsboro and Tioga Plank Road Company held an election of officers at the house of H. H. Potter, in Middlebury, on the 10th inst., and elected for President, Benjamin C. Wickham; Managers, Seth Daggett, Wm. E. Dodge, Wm. Bache, Wm. B. Clymer; Treasurer, George McLeod.

"The Company, we consider, has been very fortunate in the selection of officers, as a better board could not well be constituted. The gentlemen are all efficient and business men, possessing in an eminent degree the confidence of the public, and their election means a prompt and speedy completion of the work.

"A meeting of the managers was held at Tioga village the day after the election and measures taken to commence the work forth-

with. It is confidently believed that the road will be finished for travel by next fall."

On the new board, besides those names still locally and honorably familiar, may be noted that of a non-resident, the New York financier and philanthropist, Wm. E. Dodge. As a member of the firm of Phelps, Dodge & Co., he held large timber interests in the county. Another representative of outside ownership, though himself a citizen of Wellsboro, was Wm. B. Clymer, agent for the Bingham Estate. The treasurer, George McLeod, of the same land office, later returned from Wellsborough to Philadelphia, where his son, Dr. George McLeod, only recently deceased, became a physician and citizen of prominence.

Following the April announcement in July comes another cheerful report from the Eagle:

"The road from Wellsboro to Tioga will be partly finished during the present season. The only drawback to a vigorous prosecution of the work is the scarcity of hemlock plank of the proper size."

A word from one of our septuagenarians gives a realistic touch and a hint of primitive methods. He remembers one winter, when a boy, hauling plank for the purpose in hand "for Jim Campbell," as he puts it, "from Joe Palmer's mill at Stony Fork." Over the rough and hilly road, three yoke of oxen hitched to the sled were able to draw a load of but 1,000 feet.

In another part of the paper just referred to the managers seek sealed proposals for building a Burr bridge—whatever that may have been—"over the dead water of Crooked creek." The plan and specifications could be seen at the store of T. L. Baldwin & Co., Tioga village. From this and a previous notice it would seem that for a time the board personally superintended the work of construction.

Then, under date of Feb. 19, 1852, we read:

"The contract for grading and laying the plank on 12 miles of the Wellsboro end of the road was taken on Monday last by Joseph Rouse, for seven hundred dollars per mile. The work is to be finished by the first of next October, when the road will be opened for travel. The total cost of the road, counting the expense of plank and toll-houses, will be about $1,700 per mile. The length of the road, if brought into Wellsboro north of the center post, will be about 16½ miles, and if continued on the route of the old road, the distance will be, by continuing it up Main street, over 17 miles."

For some unknown reason Mr. Rouse threw up his contract, and the job was then taken by Mr. Chas. Herrington, with his father. The contract price per mile was raised to $800, according to a subcontractor still living in our borough. He himself built a little more than that distance from Stokesdale hitherward. As outside assistance was required, Irish labor was imported for the work. The hemlock, which sells to-day at $22, was bought then at $5.

But we must return to our newspaper story. In June there was a call for funds. "The work on the road is now progressing rapidly to completion, says the reporter, "and will be finished by next fall, unless there should be a drawback on the part of the stockholders in paying up promptly the assessments as they fall due. It will therefore depend on the stockholders whether the work shall be completed during the present season or not. If the instalments be paid there is little doubt but that the road will be finished for travel by November next. All interested should urge the necessity of those owning stock, whether it be one share or a hundred, to pay up their assessments punctually. The road cannot be made with-

out means, and the contractor cannot be expected to furnish labor without remuneration." A special notice to subscribers to a new issue of stock catches the eye, for the stub-book of these later certificates, with shares at $25 each, is still in existence and available for reference.

Under date of Nov. 11, 1852, is printed the gratifying and final announcement: "The Plank Road is being extended up Main street this week,—a single track from the tannery to the Bridge at Academy Hill, about one mile in distance. The whole line from Wellsboro to Tioga village ,seventeen miles, will shortly be completed. The Messrs. Herrington, the contractors to finish the road, have driven the work with unprecedented dispatch during the past month, surmounting every difficulty with the greatest ease, apparently. The company will soon be able to charge toll on the whole line, and the public generally [will be] also much benefited by having a good road on which to travel."

Having watched the progress of the work to its completion, let us glance for a moment at the method of construction. The surface of the road was not entirely planked over, but was divided into two tracks, one of wood and the other of earth, each eight feet in width. (I should say here that another authority makes the dirt track six feet wide.) As the heavier traffic would head towards Tioga, the planking was laid on the right side approaching that village. In general character, the wooden track was much like an exaggerated sidewalk.

After the road bed had been graded and smoothed, hemlock sills or stringers 3x4 inches in size were imbedded in the surface, in two parallel lines four feet apart. Hemlock plank, 16 feet long, and 3 inches thick, were then cut in two, laid side by side across the stringers, and "heeled in," but not spiked down. In order to prevent ruts and to allow wheels to pass on to them with greater ease, the ends of the planks, instead of being "trued" to a line, were allowed to project somewhat irregularly. Adding the space of 2 feet which was leveled and graded outside the plank to the 16 feet of the two tracks made the entire width of the road 18 feet, or, if the other informant is correct, 16 feet.

It was fortunate that the preparation for the wooden pavement—straightening, grading, ditching, sluicing and bridging the road—was of permanent value, for the "life" of the plank proved to be of short duration. Experts had considered seven years a safe estimate, but it was little more than four before legislative sanction was obtained for covering worn-out places with gravel instead of replanking them.

A more radical measure, approved April 19, 1858, and sarcastically dubbed the "Mud Supplement,' authorized the company "at such points and places on the road" as the managers saw fit, to change it to a clay, gravel or turnpike road, and in repairing those sections which remained planked to narrow the track at their discretion down to six feet. A gradual transformation was thus provided for, and as late as the sixties portions of the plank still remained in use. A letter received last October from a correspondent in Holiday says: "As for the old plank, they are very often seen now in places where the water washes the dirt off. I remember about two years ago after a flood there was about a rod of the old plank exposed. Some of them reached clear across the road."

The exact cost of the improvement, as recorded in the treasurer's second report, was $30,320.80. When it is noted that Wellsborough at the time of the execution of the work had but 113 dwellings, 116

families, and young and old, good, bad and indifferent, a population of only 617 (Tioga of course being much smaller), the gravity of the undertaking is better appreciated. It is not surprising that a debt had to be incurred.

On April 18, 1853, the property was mortgaged to the Bingham Estate for $9,000. According to the terms of the agreement the principal was to be repaid at the rate of $1,000 a year.

A brave beginning was made, but as time went on and the road failed to pay, so did the company. At last, on April 12, 1858, the property was sold at sheriff's sale for a debt of $5,429.02. The purchaser was Edward Bayer, of Tioga, and the price paid was $3,000.

It was, therefore, less than six years that the road remained in the possession of the original stockholders. At the close of that period, without having been able to declare a single dividend, it changed hands for one-tenth of its first cost. Even at that price it proved a poor bargain. Repairs added to running expenses failed to make an agreeable balance with receipts. Another disturbing feature was the fact that like that of most public utilities the conduct of the road was always a matter of contention.

After the railroad reached Wellsborough, in 1872, business fell off, and the property was allowed to run down. For some weeks in the spring, when the frost was coming out of the ground, no toll was charged. At other seasons the gatekeeper, instructed at this trying epoch simply to get what he could, often found the faithful performance of his duty made extremely difficult. The righteous payment of tolls for value received was sometimes resented or evaded, and when the owner failed to keep the road in condition the rebellious traveler made reprisals by becoming actively belligerent. Matters finally reached such a pass that an indignation meeting was held by the combative element, and a certain sum of money subscribed for the furtherance of its ends. While this spirit was rife, a party driving to a political meeting at Tioga "ran" the toll-gate. The leader was a substantial citizen who was selling bark to the Tioga tannery. The next day he directed one of his teamsters to get through the gate if possible without payment. The man was a big, powerful fellow, and headed a procession of bark teams. The toll-collector closed the gate and sat upon it. The driver raised it enough to allow the horses to pass, then let it down just in front of the load. As was expected, the gate—man and all—was torn from its moorings, with the further result that the employer was held responsible, and served with a summons to appear at court. While the suit was pending he saw the lawyer representing his side of the controversy, and the latter said, "Why don't you buy the road?" The suggestion found favor, and was carried out.

Sometime previous Mr. Bayer had gone into bankruptcy, and in the preliminary adjustments, so it is hinted, his sister-in-law, Miss Rosine M. Parmentier, of Brooklyn, N. Y., had become possessed of the title to the road. Whenever acquired, at this date it stood in her name.

Her Tioga attorney, Mr. C. H. Seymour, was approached, a settlement of legal difficulties effected, and the desired purchase consummated.

On March 28, 1876, for the sum of $100 the Wellsborough and Tioga Plank and Turnpike Road passed into the hands of Mr. Horace L. Stevens. The quit-claim deed which he then received is now an interesting curio. The new owner, having made common cause with other malcontents, was somewhat bewildered at the turn affairs had

taken, but he had no desire to espouse a lost cause and endeavor to exact further tribute from a reluctant public.

The supervisors of the townships traversed by the road pricked up their ears and sought to know Mr. Stevens's intentions. With the understanding that they should release his road taxes for the next two years he made a verbal agreement to turn the property over to their charge.

The toll-houses, which had been included in the transfer, were now sold for varying sums, and brought in the aggregate exactly the purchase price of the road. The legal costs during the time of storm and stress were $75, the taxes remitted $60. $15, therefore, was the amount paid by the party of the second part for the privilege of ending the unhappy contest, and presenting the road to the public.

Sic transit gloria! So, as a castaway, ended the old toll-road. An heroic creation, embodying the courage, faith and energy of the time, its usefulness was ever greater than its revenues. As a possession always burdensome, under changed conditions it became vexatious out of all proportion to its value, and so with slight excuse was joyfully abandoned.

But the toilsome effort of our fathers was not wasted. The money that they risked they lost, but their enterprise and shekels resolved themselves into a splendid subscription to the common weal. Out of a miserable series of sink-holes, broken bridges and general impassability they constructed a paved highway seventeen miles in length. The surface, to be sure, proved to be short-lived, but the fundamental changes were of enduring and incalculable benefit.

Such, in outline, is the history of the genesis, construction and control of the road. The story of the life upon it furnishes another chapter.

The little stations where the toll-collectors sat at the receipt of custom were four in number, and were scattered with approximate evenness along the route. There was one at each end, of course, and of the other two, one was placed between Niles Valley and Middlebury Center, and the other near Holidaytown. Their exact location was determined by tributary roads which furnished patrons— or suggested evasions. For instance, the second gate was just below the Catlin Hollow road, and the third in like relation to the road down Hill's Creek. At Wellsborough the toll-house was first situated this side of the Dickinson farm-house; but when a new way of entering and leaving town was created by a road which met the plank at the Brewster place, the gate rose to the occasion and journeyed down below that point. A similar change occurred at Tioga. Travelers covering the entire distance between Wellsborough and the former place purchased a ticket at the starting point for exhibition at the other gates, but local passengers were sometimes tempted into devious paths. Cowanesque street, which now leads into Tioga from the N. Y. Central station, was opened up just after the plank road began to be traveled. It offered a chance to enter the village by way of Brooklyn, and so escape paying toll. The opportunity was not neglected, and for this reason the gate was moved up near the old burying ground.

Each toll-house was built flush with the road, across which spread its roof, and, at the will of the keeper, the barricading gate. The little front room, fitted up as a shop, provided such refreshment as could be found in tobacco, cigars, candy, nuts and soft drinks.

With aesthetic fitness, the main business of the plank was the transportation of lumber. Over it was carried to the cars the pro-

duct of the various saw mills scattered along the route. The chief source of income, this activity was also the road's greatest menace. In the preliminary educational campaign carried on in the local press practical road-builders had urged such an encouragement of traffic as would cause the plank to wear out before they should decay. But the plank of the Tioga road needed no such fillip to promote their destruction. The heavy loads which the track made possible were increased to a weight ruinous to itself. The following account of the situation, with other data, was kindly furnished by Mr. T. A. Wickham, of Tioga, whose father was president of the road at the time of its construction:

"When the new road was first opened," says Mr. Wickham, "the practice was to charge so much a trip, but after a short time the lumbermen began to get much larger horses, and some of them made up three horse teams, hitched to heavy wagons, and drew enormously large loads. These were so very heavy that they broke and cut up the plank except when new, or comparatively so."

In consequence the road officials in 1854 obtained the right to charge double toll when the load exceeded 2,000 feet. In 1856 the rule was still further altered by the establishment of a toll-rate per 1,000 feet,—2 cents per mile. "Two years later", returning to the notes of Mr. Wickham, "the road was sold to Edward Bayer, agent of the Parmentier Estate. At that time he and his associates were operating large mills in Brooklyn, the Tioga suburb, thereby having plenty of lumber of their own manufacture for the maintenance of the road at first cost. Not very long after the purchase some of the large manufacturers of lumber, claiming that the road was not kept up in proper shape, refused to pay the last monthly toll bill. When the gate was shut against them they told their teamsters to break it and pass on. This was easily done by having one of the three horse teams equipped with strong long thills, projecting in front of the horses' heads, strike the gate with the impetus of a heavy load behind. The broken fragments then presented no further bar to progress.

After the first offense of this character Mr. Bayer sent a lot of his mill men to the toll gate the next day to stretch a heavy cable chain across he road. One end was attached to a strong post, and the other secured with a sort of windlass fastened to the building. It was operated with a lever in the hands of a very large, strong man, 6 feet and 7 inches tall, and weighing 350 pounds—a local blacksmith by the name of Reynolds. About 1:30 p. m., a string of lumber teams, about twenty in number, arrived, headed by one of the three-horse teams driven by a powerful bully. Presently the stage came along, the chain was lowered to let it pass, and immediately the head teamster attempted to follow. The chain being quickly drawn up, the horses were pushed against it by the thrust of their heavy load and thrown, the harness and wagon were broken, and further progress stopped. Mr. G. P. Card, the active agent for the lumber companies, who had driven down to manage the lumbermen's side of the battle, quickly perceived that further opposition was useless, and acceded to Mr. Bayer's proposal to drive to the office of Mr. C. H. Seymour for settlement. There he agreed to pay up all arrearage and damage, and gave bonds for future toll according to the company rates. Thus was ended the toll-gate war, so far as the toll was concerned, but a very bitter antipathy was aroused. Dire personal threats were made by the teamsters, especially against the big blacksmith who manipulated the lever with chain attachment that caused the havoc. About a month later a Fourth

of July celebration was held at Tioga, and a gang of these teamsters appeared headed by three very large and supposedly invincibe fighting bullies. They watched for a favorable opportunity to make a concentrated attack on the blacksmith, but he so quickly disposed of the leaders that the others fled for safety. One of the champions was so badly injured by a blow on the head that his life was despaired of, and a physician worked over him for some hours before he could be restored to consciousness. Together with another fighter he was under the doctor's care for some weeks.

"The foregoing incident shows the character of the rough element that was very strongly in evidence in those days; but so far as appreciation of benefits received from improvements undertaken by enterprising, progressive citizens is concerned the feeling was perhaps no different then than it is to-doy. "It may readily be noticed," continues Mr. Wickham, "that when an expensive improvement is suggested the public is very ready with enthusiastic promises of future patronage and support, but how quickly after the progressive citizen has put in the money and perhaps at a sacrifice made the enterprise a success, an army of so-called croakers and 'kickers' appears and denounces as 'money-grabbers' the person or persons who had the energy and courage to risk their capital."

So much as to the shipment of lumber. A later and somewhat parallel service performed over the road was the cartage of bark to the tanneries at Stokesdale, Niles Valley and Tioga. The dramatic climax of this historic passage has already been described.

Another item, and one of far-reaching utility, was the freighting of merchandise. Supplies were thus brought to Wellsborough and all its dependencies, then far more numerous and widespread that at present.

As to the general character of the panorama of the road, much is suggested by the lists of tolls.

"Chairs and chaises" were scheduled along with sulkies: among the heavier vehicles were "chariots, coaches, phaetons and dearborns," as well as stages and peddler and lumber wagons. At first so much was charged for every head of "neat cattle" not attached to a vehicle, but sheep and swine—called later with brutal frankness "hogs"—were always lumped together either by the half score or the score.

Many of the rates included half-cents, and were set down not only for every mile, but "so in proportion for any lesser distance, and for any greater or less number of sheep, hogs or cattle"; and these difficulties were further increased by bewildering complications connected with so much for one horse with two wheels, or so much for two horses with two wheels, or for one horse with four wheels, or two horses with four wheels or four horses with four wheels—if they were pleasure carriages. Otherwise you began again with two horses, and added a certain sum for each horse, bearing in mind at the same time the state of the wagon—whether loaded or empty.

With such a series of permutations and combinations it would seem that nothing short of the higher mathematics could have solved the problems and saved the reason of the unfortunate gatekeeper. Luckily, as time went on the affair became much simpler, so that the other day when I talked with a surviving toll-collector he was able to run through his list off-hand: "Two cents a mile for a light wagon drawn by two horses and one and a half cents for the same with one horse. Two cents for a loaded lumber wagon, one and a half cents for the same empty. Two cents a score for cattle. One cent a score for sheep and hogs." All went merrily as far as "a

horse and his rider," but they gave him pause. Such visitants had become too rare in the seventies—the time of his administration—to leave a fixed idea of their value.

As far back as 1831 an adventurous spirit in the postal service, who had been carrying the mail on horse back between Tioga and Wellsborough projected a tri-weekly stage line to cover the same route "Leave Tioga at 6 o'clock a. m.," so ran the prospectus, "arrive at Wellsboro same day." The further story of this bold scheme is lost in the limbo of the past.

In 1852, the year of the completion of the plank road, great improvements were made in the equipment of the Blossburg and Corning railroad, and it is highly probable that a stage connection over the new route was promptly established.

Smith and Clark, a firm of Tioga liverymen ,are known to have carried on such a business, and the next proprietor, whose name was for years connected with that of the road, was George Hazlett, also of Tioga. Every day a stage was run each way. Starting at ten in the morning it reached its destination at one p. m. Faster time than this was often made by private parties. During the plank era eight men were once driven from Wellsborough to Tioga by one team of horses in an hour and twenty-eight minutes. This was done on a bet that the trip could not be made in less than an hour and a half. It is safe to assume that the horses were not consulted.

Carrying the mails and express added to the dignity and profit of the stages, on which a through ticket cost $1.50. Four horses were employed, and originally, the round-bodied throughbrace coach with a boot fore-and-aft. This type was replaced by the more commonplace square-rigged conveyance, amply curtained against the weather.

At first there was but one postoffice en route—that at Holidaytown; but after some years this was companioned by another at Niles Valley. The only other stopping-place was Potter's," the well-known hostelry, where the horses were watered, while the grooms and driver exchanged pleasantries and the latest news. Potter's hotel or tavern, standing about midway of the plank, as its junction with a road from the Cowanesque, was well situated for attracting custom from three directions. It became the main feature of the road, and was for many years an objective point for all kinds of excursions. The railroad sapped its life along with that of the road.

For a short time before the conclusion of the whole matter the Hazlett business had a rival in an "Air Line," of stages, run by Frederick D .Bunnell, at a greatly accelerated rate of speed. His record trip was made in one hour and twenty minutes—said to be the shortest time in which a team ever covered the route.

At least once a year a circus trailed its slow length along the plank, and brought into this remote region a motley collection gathered from the four corners of the earth. Wild beasts hidden in their wagon cages, sleepy, sullen or despairing, rumbled through a new environment. The gorgeous band chariot, trick horses, trapeze performers, capering clowns and dazzling ladies were all in evidence if not in form. Ponderous elephants and sneering camels lumbered and stalked along in their unending march, and with eyes that first saw light in the jungles of India or of Africa, or on the sands of Egypt, looked out, unheeding, on the windings of Crooked creek, on Potter's and the Hogback, on picturesque stump fences, stretches of pleasant woods and the soft blue of the Marsh Creek hills. The only feature that could have been of interest to these foreign visitors was the watering-troughs—those rustic fountains made from logs still

wearing their rough coats of bark, hewn out, and fed from mountain springs.

The approach of the caravan, promising entrance into a fantastic world of mystery and romance, sent abroad a thrill of excitement, and set the whole countryside astir. At these times, Mr. Bayer's alert manager, John Starkey, of Middlebury, both by precept and example urged the guardians of the gates to especial vigilance. A matutinal visit from his chief, at the early hour of five, would find one of them, as he proudly reports, already up and doing. Nor was he the only gatekeeper who kept strict faith with his employers. One in particular whose name appears in the treasurer's report for 1854, and who was still on duty when the gates were removed in 1876, was famous for his conscientious diligence. I refer to the late Jacob Hall. His zeal and activity were a constant challenge to the spirit of mischief in boys and men.

One graceless youth, soon after "running" the toll-gate, left town. But the hawk eyes of the faithful sentinel had identified the culprit, and when he returned to Wellsborough some years later he was accosted on the street and dunned for the missing pennies. In the matter of change this collector was equally punctilious towards the traveler, and would run after him to render his dues down to the uttermost farthing. It may be the same man to whom Mr. Wickham refers as having an unusual record, and of whom he narrates the following anecdote:

"His vigorous prosecution of duty had so impressed a certain man that he offered to bet ten dollars that no person could get through the gate without his knowledge, even in the night, provided that the horse or horses were driven on a trot. Another party accepted the wager, made some bags, putting rags in the bottom, and fastened them to the horses' feet. About one o'clock at night he attempted the adventure, but was promptly met by the vigilant sentinel, who, though in nocturnal attire, held up his lantern and demanded his toll. Some friends of both parties were nearby, watching the result, the bet was cheerfully paid, and the remarkable reputation well maintained."

So we may turn back to the old toll-road, and try to reinvest it with the varied and phantasmic shapes, forms and semblances of the past. Or we may seek to re-create some of the incidents that took place upon it—daily and commonplace, or occasional and tragic, farcical or festive, as the case might be.

However inadequate the result, let us hope that like a faded photograph it may humbly serve to bring to mind the features of a lost original.

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